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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED MCN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [GG](#) [RS](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: GERMANY SHARES U.S. CONCERNS REGARDING RUSSIAN
UPGRADE IN RELATIONS WITH ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

REF: STATE 40673

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JEFF RATHKE. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. German officials at both the MFA and the Chancellery share U.S. concerns regarding recent Russian presidential instructions issued in regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and are open to delivering a joint demarche with the U.S. and others to Moscow on the matter. Meanwhile, the Germans expect the EU presidency to issue a statement today (April 18), which might be followed up by an EU demarche. The MFA Director for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia looks forward to further coordination on this matter at the April 21 Quad meeting in London, where the U.S. will be represented by EUR DAS David Merkel. END SUMMARY.

Chancellery on Same Page as U.S.

¶2. (C) DCM delivered reftel points to Deputy National Security Advisor Rolf Nikel at the Chancellery April 18, emphasizing U.S. concerns that the new Russian "mechanisms" designed to protect the rights of Russian citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia constituted a challenge to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The U.S. hoped Germany would join it in raising these concerns with Russia.

¶3. (C) Nikel said he thought the U.S. and Germany were "on the same page" regarding this matter. He emphasized that Germany is also very concerned about the recent Russian moves, views them as creating a risk of further escalation, and believes Russia needs to change its approach. He promised Germany would be clear about full support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

¶4. (C) Nikel said the Chancellery believes that Germany, as coordinator of the group of western friends, should organize a common demarche in Moscow to express strong concern

regarding the Russian action and to tell Russia it needs to change its approach. Nikel did not indicate whether this would include rescinding the presidential instructions. He said the aim would be to convince Moscow to change course, and he thought a joint demarche would be more effective in this regard. He said the EU presidency was also working on a statement that would be released soon.

15. (C) Finally, he noted that a senior Georgian government representative from Tbilisi was scheduled to see him later today (April 18) and was supposedly bringing "creative ideas" that he (the Georgian) did not want to discuss on the phone. (Comment: Post will follow up with Nikel on this early next week and report septel as appropriate. End Comment.)

MFA Engaged

16. (C) Political Minister Counselor also delivered reftel points to MFA Director General for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia Hans-Dieter Lucas April 18. Lucas noted that he had just returned from Moscow the day before and had raised these same concerns at the Russian MFA right before the presidential instructions were issued April 16. Lucas said he had told the Russians that Germany saw a direct contradiction between this course of action and Russia's commitment to Georgian territorial integrity in the UN peace process. Lucas said he had also pointed out that such a move would undermine Russia's facilitator role in that process.

17. (C) Lucas said the Russians insisted that these "mechanisms" were not an attempt at creeping annexation and that Russia had no intention of recognizing Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Rather, the intent of these new instructions was

simply to facilitate economic development of the two provinces. The Russia MFA noted that the government was under extreme pressure from the Duma to do more in this regard, with some criticizing the government for not have recognized the independence of the two provinces right from the very start. Lucas said the Russians had also claimed that Russia was standing by its commitment not to supply weapons to Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

Red Lines for Russian Recognition

18. (C) Lucas said he also raised this matter with the Russian MFA director of policy planning, who is reportedly close to FM Lavrov. According to Lucas, this official said that there were only two scenarios under which Russia would recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: 1) if Georgia became a NATO member (the official did not specify whether that extended to the NATO membership action plan or only membership itself) or 2) if Georgia employed military force in the provinces. Lucas felt confident that Russia, in fact, would not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia unless one of these two events came to pass. He noted that Putin had made it clear in public statements that Russia was not going to "make the same mistake" the West had made in recognizing Kosovo. Putin rarely went back on his public pronouncements.

Advising Restraint from Georgia

19. (C) Lucas also noted that he just seen the Georgian ambassador and that he had emphasized to him that Georgia had the full support of the international community and should therefore not jeopardize that support by doing something "stupid" and responding to Russian provocations. Lucas noted that there were rumors of Georgia troop movements, so it was critical to urge the Georgians not to do anything militarily.

Next Steps

¶10. (C) Lucas confirmed that the EU presidency was currently working on a public statement expressing concerns about the Russia action that should be released today (April 18). Rather than issue its own statement on a national basis, Lucas said Germany would probably just make reference to the EU statement. Lucas said it was possible the EU would follow up with a joint demarche in Moscow. Lucas was also open to Germany joining the group of western friends in doing something jointly. Lucas noted that he would meet his quad counterparts, including EUR DAS David Merkel, in London April 21, where next steps could be discussed further.

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